

**Members of the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly**

**Subject:** Restoration of Funding for the Connecticut Humanities Council Inc. within the budget of the Department of Economic & Community Development

**Submitted by:** William Hosley, Terra Firma Northeast, Enfield, CT

**Testimony on Behalf of Funding for Connecticut Humanities  
By William Hosley February 17, 2017**

I am here to testify on behalf of state funding for Connecticut Humanities and the community of cultural organizations that look to it for leadership and support. Two years ago when I testified, I noted how Connecticut Humanities played a singular role as the lead sponsor for the “Colt’s Empire” exhibition at Wadsworth Atheneum, a project that spawned the Coltsville National Park and adaptive reuse of the Colt’s Armory complex. Once operational, it will bring an additional 100,000+ visitors to Hartford year after year. Many jobs will be created as a result.

Connecticut Humanities is one of the most respected State Humanities councils in the country largely because of the General Assembly’s commitment to it. Here in Connecticut we have a unique public private partnership that has made our state humanities council more responsive and proactive in its public service and leadership - especially for organizations in the towns you represent – for the community-based museums that otherwise would never see a dime of state support.

As a fiscal realist and parent, I worry about Connecticut’s slow-growth economy. I applaud the Governor’s call for fiscal restraint. And I especially applaud the Governor’s call to eliminate the arts earmarks that constitute a corruption and embarrassment. Alas, the Governor’s budget is vague about how that would be done - except to say that what funds are allocated to for tourism, the arts, preservation, history and humanities would be administered by the Office of Culture & Tourism, on which I sit on the advisory board. We CAN make the required adjustments without compromising the quality of services. We can – in fact – do more with less by reforming processes and policies with the aim of increasing access and equity.

My understanding is that among all 50 states, Connecticut ranks dead last between competitive grants and special interest earmarks for the arts and humanities. Most of the public support goes to about 20 organizations whose lobbyists are familiar fixtures at the state capitol: Then there's \$604k for regional arts councils – where most do not administer grant programs that support organizations in their regions. More recently we have this new Art Museums Consortium – in for an earmark of \$450k and I won't even start on the Connecticut Science Center, the New Haven Arts & Ideas Festival or the saga of Amistad America – which the state largely bought and paid for. And this doesn't even begin to explore bonding initiatives where the same pattern applies. The rich get richer. The big guys get everything and the 90% of mostly small, mostly local often extraordinary museums and cultural organizations – the kinds of things most legislators have in their districts - if they get anything – its only because Connecticut Humanities and Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation have modest, competitive, transparent, merit-based, grant programs where lobbyists and connections are not required to get a little help.

The arts earmarks are a slap in the face to everyone that plays by the rules and if you represent a town or region that is not among the privileged dozen+ localities where most of this money goes – then your constituents are not being touched by this gusher of special interest money. It's not fair. But most of all – its bad public policy.

When you support Connecticut Humanities, you support a more level playing field. You support the idea of equity, transparency and fairness.

Cut anything. Cut the arts earmarks in half or eliminate them entirely. Indeed, if you cut the earmarks by 1/3 you could double funding for Connecticut Humanities (and through them the League of Connecticut History Organizations) – and still meet the Governor's budgetary expectations. It wouldn't come close to leveling the playing field, but it would be a move in the right direction.

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